

# Presentation by Phillip Blake to the Berger Commission

## PHILLIP BLAKE: Sworn.

Mr. Berger, my name is Phillip Blake and I am a treaty Indian from Fort McPherson. I have worked as a social worker here in Fort McPherson here for the past five and a half years. Now, before I go any further on, I would personally like to welcome you to Fort McPherson. I hope you enjoy your stay here.

First, I would like to say I am not an old man, but I have seen many changes in my life. Fifteen years ago, most of what you see as Fort McPherson did not exist. Take a look around the community now. And you will start to get an idea of what has happened to the Indian people here over the past few years.

Look at the housing where transient Government staff live. And look at the housing where the Indian people live. Look at which houses are connected to the utilidor. Look at how school and hostel, the R.C.M.P. and government staff houses are right in the center of town. Dividing the Indian people into two sides.

Look at where the Bay store is, right on top of the highest point of land.

Mr. Berger, do you think that this is the way the Indian people chose to have this community? Do you think the people here had any voice in planning this community? Do you think they would have planned it so that it would divide them, pardon me.

Do you think they would have planned it so that it divided them and gave them a poorer standard than the transient whites who come in, supposedly to help them? Take a look at the school here. Try to find anything that makes it a place where Indian values, traditions, and Indian culture is respected.

It could be a school in the suburbs of Edmonton, Toronto or Vancouver. Do you think Indian people would have chosen a building like this as a way to teach their children how to be proud of their Indian heritage?

Do you think Indian people chose to have their children taught that the only way to survive in the future is to become like the white man?

Look around you. Look at this building. Find out who the teachers are. Find out what they teach our children. Find out what regulations there are in this school, find out who decides these regulations. Who hires the teachers and who fires them.

This school is just a symbol of white domination and control. It is a part of a system set up to destroy Indian culture and to destroy our pride in our Indian heritage.

It is only part of that system. Look at some of the other parts. Do you think people chose to live in rental houses owned by the government, instead of in houses they built for themselves and owned by themselves? Do you think they chose to have a system of justice which often they can not understand and which does not allow them to help their own people, and deal with their own problems?

A system which punishes the Indians for stealing from the Bay, but does not punish the Bay for stealing from the Indians? Do you think that they chose to become cheap labour for oil companies, construction companies and government? Instead of working for themselves and developing their own economy, in their own way?

In short, Mr. Berger, can you or anyone else really believe that we Indian people are now living the way we have chosen to live? Can you really believe that we have chosen to have high rates of alcoholism, murder, suicide and social breakdown? Do you think we have chosen to become beggars in our own homeland?

Mr. Berger, you are well aware that hundreds of years ago, in southern Canada and in the United States, many Indian civilizations were destroyed. In some cases, this was done simply by killing off the Indian, Indian people, I should say, who occupied the land, the land that was valuable to white settlers.

In other cases, it was done by restricting the Indians to small reserves where they could no longer hunt, fish and make a living from their land. In all cases, it was pretty clear that whatever the white man wanted, the white man got.

When he wanted greater land for farming, he cleared off the trees and he cleared off the Indians. When he wanted to dig the gold, or minerals from the land, he killed the Indians who tried to defend their own land.

In James Bay, when the white man decided that he wanted to again play God and change the course of mighty rivers, so he could make money and power from them, he corralled the Indian people, the Indians, into reserves and



flooded the Indian land. The nations of Indians and Eskimos in the North have been slightly luckier.

For a while it seemed that we might escape the greed of the southern system. The north was seen as a frozen wasteland, not fit for the civilized ways of the white man. But that has been changing over the past few years.

Now the system of genocide practiced on our Indian brothers in the south, over the past few hundred years in now being turned loose on us, and our Eskimo brothers. "Don't be silly", you may say. "We are sorry about what we did in the past, we made some mistakes". "But it's different now".

"Look, we give you an education, houses and health services".

Mr. Berger, the system of genocide may have become a little more polished over the past few hundred years in order to suit the civilized tastes of the southern people who watch Lloyd Robertson on the National.

But the effect is exactly the same. We are being destroyed. Your nation is destroying our nation. What we are saying today, here and now is exactly what Louis Riel was saying roughly a hundred years ago.

We are a nation. We have our own land, our own ways and our own civilization. We do not want to destroy you or your land. Please do not destroy us.

You and I both know what happened to Louis Riel. Yet now, a hundred years later, your Prime Minister is willing to say that Louis Riel was not all wrong. He is willing to say that, a hundred years later.

But is he willing to change the approach that destroyed Louis Riel? And his nation? And is now threatening to destroy us?

I am sure throughout your visits to native communities, Mr. Berger, that you have been shown much of the hospitality that is our tradition, as a people. We have always tried to treat our guests well, it never occurred to us that our guests would one day claim that they owned our whole house. Yet that is exactly what is happening.

White people came as visitors to our land. Suddenly they claim it as their land. They claim that we have no right to call it Indian land, land that we have occupied and used for thousands of years. Which just recently the white man has come to visit. And suddenly he claims it to be his own.

Is this the great system of justice, which your nation is so proud of? Now look at what happened to France during the Second World War? Germany moved in and occupied the land that France claimed as her own.

At that time, Canada seemed willing to help a people whose land had been unjustly taken. Now, the same thing is happening to Indian nations of the north. Your nation has suddenly decided to move in and occupy land that is rightfully ours.

Where is your great tradition of justice today? Does your nation's greed for oil and gas suddenly override justice? What exactly is your superior civilization? That can so blindly ignore the injustice occurring continually over one-third of the land mass in Canada? And yet barely gets reported on your T.V. or newspapers?

One third of the land mass of Canada is under the direct colonial rule. Yet you seem willing only to talk of igloos, polar bears and snow when you talk about the north. One has to read about South Africa or Rhodesia to get a clear picture of what is really happening in Northern Canada. While your newspapers and television talk about sports fishing up here, we as a people, are being destroyed.

And it doesn't even merit any coverage.

Look at us. And what we stand for, before you accept without further thought that the Indian nation must die. In many parts of the world, people are starving. It is said that two-thirds of the people of the world go to bed hungry each night. We Indian people are sometimes accused of not being willing to share our resources. But what of this absurd scheme that Arctic Gas has dreamt up?

What does it offer to those who are starving? Does it promise to use our resources and our land to help those who are poor? It suggests exactly the opposite.

It suggests that we give up our land and our resources to the richest nation in the world. Not the poorest.

We are threatened with genocide only so that the rich and the powerful can become more rich and more powerful.

Mr. Berger, I suggest that in any man's view, that is immoral. If our Indian nation is being destroyed so that poor people of the world might get a chance to share this world's riches, then as Indian people, I am sure that we would seriously consider giving up our resources.

But do you really expect us to give up our life, our lands so that those few people who are the richest and the most powerful in the world today can maintain and defend their own immoral position of privilege?

That is not our way.

I strongly believe that we do have something to offer your nation. However, something other than our minerals. I believe it is in the self-interest of your own nation to allow the Indian nation to survive and develop in our own way, on our own land.

For thousands of years, we have lived with the land, we have taken care of the land, and the land has taken care of us. We did not believe that our society has to grow and to expand and conquer new areas in order that we could fulfill our destiny as Indian people.

We have lived with the land, not tried to conquer or control it, or rob it of its riches. That is not our way.

We have not tried to get more and more riches and power, we have not tried to conquer new frontiers or outdo our parents. Or make sure that every year that we are richer than the year before.

We have been satisfied to see our wealth as ourselves and the land we live with. It is our greatest wish to be able to pass this on, this land to succeeding generations in the same condition that our fathers have given it to us. We did not try to improve the land and we did not try to destroy it. That is not our way.

I believe that your nation might wish to see us, not as a relic from the past, but as a way of life. A system of values by which you may survive in the future. This we are willing to share.

If your nation chooses instead to continue to try and destroy our nation, then I hope you will understand why we are willing to fight so that our nation can survive. It is our world.

We do not wish to push our world onto you. But we are willing to defend it for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. If your nation becomes so violent that it would tear up our land, destroy our society and our future, and occupy our homeland, by trying to impose this pipeline against our will, then of course we will have no choice but to react with violence.

I hope we do not have to do that. For it is not the way we would choose. However, if we are forced to blow up the pipeline, I hope you will not only look on the violence of Indian action, but also on the violence of your own nation which would force us to take such a course.

We will never initiate violence. But if your nation threatens by its own violent action to destroy our nation, you will have given us no choice.

Please do not force us into this position. For we could all lose too much.

Mr. Berger, I believe it is because I am a social worker here that I have, in a sense had to make some sense out of the frustration and desperation that people in this community and others along the valley are feeling. I have therefore tried to read as much as possible of other situations in Canada and in the world.

It is clear to me that the pipeline in Alaska has not been any part of progress, whatever progress may mean. Where progress should mean people getting greater controls over their own lives, greater freedom, the pipeline in Alaska appears to have driven people into the ground. Along with the pipeline.

Clearly, we do not want that here. Perhaps it is also because I am a social worker that I am aware that what steps my people may take in reaction to the building of a pipeline here.

Mr. Berger, it should be very clear by now what are the wishes of the people along the Mackenzie Valley regarding the pipeline here. I do not believe you or anyone else could misunderstand what the native people of this valley are saying.

Obviously if we lived in any kind of a democratic system, there would be no further talk of Gas Arctic pipeline. The will of the people has been made very clear. If this consensus, if the will of the people is not respected, then I appeal to you and all people of southern Canada to respect and support us in our efforts to re-establish democracy and democratic decision making in our homeland.

I guess the question for southern Canada is simply which side are you on? Are you on the side of the people trying to find freedom and a democratic tradition? Or are you on the side of those who are trying to frustrate our attempts to find freedom?

Are you on the side of those who are trying to frustrate our attempts to find freedom and who are, instead, trying to destroy the last free Indian nation?

Mr. Berger, I guess what I am really trying to say is, can you help us? And can we help you make sure that the will of the people is respected? After all, isn't that what— isn't that supposed to be what Canada once stood for?

Can we as an Indian nation keep, help Canada to once again become a true democracy?

Thank you very much, sir.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.



# The Dene Declaration

## STATEMENT OF RIGHTS

We the Dene of the N.W.T. insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation.

Our struggle is for the recognition of the Dene Nation by the Government and people of Canada and the peoples and governments of the world.

As once Europe was the exclusive homeland of the European peoples, Africa the exclusive homeland of the African peoples, the New World, North and South America, was the exclusive homeland of Aboriginal peoples of the New World, the Amerindian and the Inuit.

The New World like other parts of the world has suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism. Other peoples have occupied the land--often with force--and foreign governments have imposed themselves on our people. Ancient civilizations and ways of life have been destroyed.

Colonialism and imperialism is now dead or dying. Recent years have witnessed the birth of new nations or rebirth of old nations out of the ashes of colonialism.

As Europe is the place where you will find European countries with European governments for European peoples, now also you will find in Africa and Asia the existence of African and Asian countries with African and Asian governments for the African and Asian peoples.

The African and Asian peoples--the peoples of the Third World--have fought for and won the right to self-determination, the right to recognition as distinct peoples and the recognition of themselves as nations.

But in the New World the native peoples have not fared so well. Even in countries in South America where the Native peoples are the vast majority of the population **there is not one country which has an Amerindian government for the Amerindian peoples.**

Nowhere in the New World have the Native peoples won the right to self-determination and the right to recognition by the world as a distinct people and as Nations.

While the Native people of Canada are a minority in their homeland, the Native people of the N.W.T., the Dene and the Inuit, are a majority of the population of the N.W.T.

The Dene find themselves as part of a country. That country is Canada. But the Government of Canada is not the government of the Dene. The Government of the N.W.T. is not the government of the Dene. These governments were not the choice of the Dene, there were imposed upon the Dene.

What we the Dene are struggling for is the recognition of the Dene Nation by the governments and peoples of the world.

And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people and the recognition of the Dene Nation.

We the Dene are part of the Fourth World. And as the peoples and Nations of the world have come to recognize the existence and rights of those peoples who make up the Third World the day must come and will come when the nations of the Fourth World will come to be recognized and respected. The challenge to the Dene and the world is to find the way for the recognition of the Dene Nation.

Our plea to the world is to help us in our struggle to find a place in the world community where we can exercise our right to self-determination as a distinct people and as a nation.

What we seek then is independence and self-determination within the country of Canada. This is what we mean when we call for a just land settlement for the Dene Nation.

## NATIVE NATION

(Reprint of an editorial that appeared in the Edmonton Journal, July 24, 1975)

There is a temptation to react negatively to reports that Northern Indian and Metis organizations are talking about recognition of their people as a nation within Canada.

To dismiss their statements as separatist nonsense, however, would be both hasty and wrong, for it would be at the risk of responding to what the native peoples involved appear to be saying rather than responding to what they seem to be trying to say.

The word nation is difficult to use at the best of times, because it comes encumbered with all the meanings and nuances that accompany the concept of the sovereign nation state and its armies, tariffs, foreign policies and corpus of laws.

It is further obscured by the cloud of politics, emotion, economics and inflammatory rhetoric surrounding land claims by Indian, Metis and Inuit organizations in the Northwest Territories.



What the native organizations appear to be saying on the surface is that they demand sovereign status as a nation with all the powers of an independent state - powers to establish international trade relationships, military alliances, and the like.

To accept such a proposal at its face value, however, is to blindly stereotype those making the statement as utterly naive and politically unaware. Popular as such a view of native organizations might be in some unenlightened quarters, the opposite is clearly the case.

The most unsophisticated of native leaders can hardly be unaware that Canada as a nation is not going to permit the secession of a third of the territory it claims on the basis of demands by 30,000 people. And even if Canada were to go along with such a secession, the United States would never accept such a flimsy political structure on the Arctic frontier with Russia. The very idea is ridiculous except in the context of a rhetorical tool.

It is necessary, therefore, to attempt to penetrate beyond the superficial and the inarticulate in order to evaluate what reasoning lies behind the call for a national status for Northern natives.

Perhaps the best way to do so is to place the concept the native organizations seem to be espousing within a particular historical frame of reference.

Canadian law has long recognized that native people have special status over and above their fundamental rights as citizens. This status flows from the Indian Act and is further manifest in the treaties which the government has signed with various Indian bands and tribal groups. Governments do not sign treaties with groups of people unless they recognize a valid claim to a national sovereignty of some kind or another.

But, while native people have been special citizens in the eyes of the law, they have not been equal in the eyes of Canadian society at large.

They have not shared equally in the wealth generated within their own country, they have not benefited equally from the social services provided by that wealth, their cultures have been shattered, and they have experienced little opportunity to control their own political and social destiny within Canada.

The native people of the Canadian North are now faced with the same kind of social and economic pressures that dismembered and emasculated native cultures south of the 60th Parallel.

What they are saying in their plea for national recognition is that history should not be permitted to repeat itself with the same disastrous consequences for a minority group which is paradoxically the majority in the Northwest Territories.

They are asking that Canadian society recognize that special circumstances trigger special needs with respect to the preservation of cultural integrity.

They are asking a reasonable degree of self-determination in a territory where they are the majority, and they are asking that the government negotiate with them as a national group in the particular context of the bargaining for a just and equitable settlement of native claims.

Considered in that light, their proposals for a new structure of government in the North are ambitious, but they are certainly reasonable suggestions in a democratic society. Provided they are not intended to deprive any other citizens of basic rights, they are worthy of Ottawa's attention.

It seems reasonable to assume, in any event, that the discussion of national status by native leaders should not be construed as a separatist demand to opt out of Canada, but rather as a call for positive action in the face of a pressing problem.



# Date Due

NOV 12 '87			
JUN 14 '89			
12 '88			

24207 Pam:325.3: (\*440)  
DENE1

The Dene declaration.

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE DUE
	D Karpinski	NOV 12 '87
	Ron Hamb	JUN 14 '89
	G. Nammemeister	MAR 12 '90
	Rhonda Lakovic	JUL 27 '90

24207 Pam:325.3: (\*440)  
DENE1

The Dene declaration.

FOR NORTHERN STUDIES LIBRARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA. T6G 2E9

